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ABSTRACT

Professionals who work in the area of vocational education for students with special needs were surveyed to determine how they identify exemplary programs. Those students include those who are handicapped, disabled, dropouts, of limited English proficiency, immigrants, displaced homemakers, dislocated workers, disadvantaged, single or teen parents, nontraditional enrollees, blind or hearing impaired, and incarcerated individuals. For the 500 surveys distributed in several states, 366 responses were received from vocational teachers, local administrators, university teacher educators, vocational special needs teachers, special education teachers, and state-level administrators. The kinds of information the respondents thought were most valuable in describing effective programs and practices were educational goals, including anticipated learner outcomes; special population of students served; and detailed description of the program components or intervention. The most credible student outcome evidence for judging vocational special needs programs and practices was said to be acquisition of employability and survival skills; job placement data and training-related and unrelated jobs taken; and enrollment and completion data. The information most helpful in judging the effectiveness of vocational special needs programs and practices was found to be evidence describing the effects of the program upon student attainment of intended outcomes; number and type of special population students enrolling and completing over the previous 3 years, and case studies describing individual students before, during, and following program enrollment. Twenty preliminary components of exemplary vocational education programs were identified through this and a related study. (CML)

NCRVE

National Center for Research in Vocational Education

University of California, Berkeley

TASPP BRIEF

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NATIONAL RECOGNITION PROGRAM FOR EXEMPLARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS SERVING SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATIONS

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For the past two decades, federal vocational education legislation has provided funding of programs and support services designed to enhance the participation of special population students in secondary and postsecondary vocational education programs. While numerous programming approaches have been attempted, few have been successfully evaluated or examined. Most of the studies of effective vocational education programs serving special population students have focused on a particular group of students (e.g., the handicapped). Further, the studies have often been descriptive in nature and have seldom examined the relationships between program components and the student outcomes achieved by program completers.

During 1989 one of the responsibilities of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education's (NCRVE) Technical Assistance for Special Populations Program (TASPP) was to identify and disseminate information concerning exemplary vocational education programs serving students with special needs. In order to determine how professionals working in the area of vocational education for students with special needs identify exemplary programs, a national survey was conducted by the University of Illinois Site Director, Dr. Allen Phelps and Graduate Research Assistant, Thomas R. Wermuth. This BRIEF highlights the results of the survey as well as a preliminary framework for describing the components of exemplary vocational education programs for students with special needs.

During 1990 this framework will provide the structure which TASPP staff and the TASPP National Task Force will use in identifying exemplary vocational education programs serving (1) students who are at risk of dropping out, (2) immigrants or limited English proficient (LEP) students, and (3) teen parents. Additionally, this framework may prove valuable to state boards of vocational education as they evaluate and fund program searches, policy makers interested in programmatic issues associated with effective vocational education programs, and researchers interested in studying the effectiveness of various vocational education strategies used with special population learners.

Results of a National Survey

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

The survey was distributed to 500 professionals in several states working in the area of vocational education programs serving students with special needs. Respondents chose from among an array of diverse programs and instructional strategies currently in use, the criteria they felt were critical in determining which programs are exemplary. A total of 366 individuals representing the following positions responded to the survey:

- vocational teachers
- local administrators
- university teacher educators
- vocational special needs teachers
- special education teachers
- state level administrators

Survey respondents worked with or had interest in serving the following special populations:

- handicapped/disabled
- dropouts
- LEP/immigrants
- displaced homemakers
- dislocated workers
- disadvantaged
- single/teen parents
- non-traditional enrollees
- other (blind/hearing impaired)
- incarcerated/offenders

Most of the respondents are currently working in secondary school settings. However, postsecondary institutions, universities and colleges, state agencies, and adult education facilities were also represented.

Survey Questions

In order to determine the criteria and information that is most valuable when identifying exemplary programs, respondents were asked to rank order several responses to questions within the following four categories:

- Information most valuable in **describing** effective programs and practices
- Student outcome evidence most **credible** in judging the effectiveness of vocational programs serving youth and adults with special needs
- Information most helpful in **judging** the effectiveness of vocational special needs programs and practices
- Appropriate approaches for **identifying** effective programs and practices

SURVEY RESULTS

For question one, survey respondents were asked to check all items they believed important in describing effective programs and practices. The collective, prioritized responses are presented below in descending order of importance.

For questions two and three, respondents were asked to rank order the five most important elements in judging program evaluation and student outcome evidence for exemplary programs. For these items, ordinal and composite mean rankings were evaluated. There were only slight differences in the two sets of rankings. The ordinal rankings are presented below for both questions to illustrate the descending priority of information needed to judge the effectiveness of programs being studied or reviewed.

For question four, survey respondents were asked to select one of two approaches they believe is the most important for identifying effective programs and practices.

1. What kind of information do you think is most valuable in describing effective programs and practices?

1. Educational goals, including anticipated learner outcomes
2. Special population students served
3. Detailed description of the program components or intervention
4. Inter- and intra-agency cooperative arrangements/ agreements
5. Educational environment or setting
6. Resources used, including staffing, total cost, and cost per client
7. Duties and qualifications of primary staff

2. What student outcome evidence do you feel is most credible in judging vocational special needs programs and practices?

1. Acquisition of employability/survival skills
2. Job placement data, training related and non-training related jobs taken
3. Enrollment and completion data
4. Labor market experience
5. Independence/dependence of program completers from public assistance
6. Extent to which students pursue further education and training
7. Acquisition of basic/academic skills
8. Acquisition of occupationally specific skills

3. What information do you find most helpful in judging the effectiveness of vocational special needs programs and practices?

1. Evidence describing the effects of the program upon student attainment of intended outcomes
2. Number and type of special population students enrolling and completing over the past three years
3. Case studies describing individual students before, during, and following program enrollment
4. Information on the soundness or limitations of the evidence
5. Information from self studies of the program
6. Number and type of special needs students who do not complete the program
7. Information from reports provided by state departments

4. Which of the two general approaches identified below is the most appropriate for identifying effective programs and practices?

1. Collect and analyze evidence on the implementation and effects of programs and practices
2. Solicit nominations from knowledgeable leaders

In choosing between two general approaches for identifying effective programs and practices, survey respondents favored collecting and analyzing evidence on the implementation and effects of programs and practices significantly more than the alternate option of soliciting nominations from knowledgeable leaders. This stated preference for an analytical process constitutes **a call for change** in this area. To date, most effective program and practice studies have used a nomination strategy to identify and select exemplary programs.

The programs identified by TASPP in subsequent years will be a result of extensive field based research on the components and criteria that comprise an "exemplary" program. TASPP staff are currently in the process of refining both the framework and the evaluation process for designating exemplary vocational education programs serving youth and adults with special needs. Presently, the framework and evalution process are being field tested at six sites throughout the U.S.

Framework for Describing the Components of Exemplary Vocational Education Programs Serving Students with Special Needs

TASPP researchers began developing this framework in a related study in 1988. The components of the framework were gleaned from a variety of sources including the results of the previously mentioned national survey. In addition, certain components of effective programs became apparent as result of a 1988 policy options study. This study examined issues regarding program access, quality, and outcomes for youth and adults with special needs nationally. Finally, an extensive review and content analysis was conducted which involved analysis of the following sources:

- recent research studies of effective vocational education programs serving special needs learners
- criteria and reports from selected state boards of education studies of "best practices" in vocational special needs education
- current literature on effective instruction
- current federal education legislative provisions (e.g., JTPA)
- textbooks designed for teacher education courses on vocational education for special population students

To date, the research team has identified twenty preliminary components of exemplary vocational education programs serving youth and adults with special needs. These twenty preliminary components have been grouped into five clusters and are listed below:

Preliminary Components of Exemplary Vocational Education Programs

Program Administration
- **Strong Administrative Leadership and Support**
- **Sufficient Financial Support**
- **Staff Development**
- **Formative Program Evaluation**
- **Summative Program Evaluation**

Curriculum and Instruction
- **Individualized Curriculum Modifications**
- **Integration of Academic and Vocational Curricula**
- **Appropriate Instructional Settings**
- **Cooperative Learning Experiences**

Comprehensive Support Services
- **Assessment of Individual's Vocational Interests and Abilities**
- **Instructional Support Services (Aides, Resources)**
- **Ongoing Career Guidance and Counseling**

Formalized Articulation and Communication
- **Family/Parent Involvement and Support**
- **Notification of Both Students and Parents Regarding Vocational Opportunities**
- **Vocational Educators' Involvement in Individualized Planning**
- **Formalized Transition Planning**
- **Intra- and Inter-agency Collaboration**

Occupational Experience
- **Work Experience Opportunities**
- **Job Placement Services**
- **Follow-up of Graduates and Non-graduates**

TASPP Objectives

When completed, this framework will be used by TASPP staff and the TASPP National Task Force to accomplish the following objectives:

- Select and describe "model" programs
- Develop technical assistance resources
- Strengthen inservice and preservice teacher education preparation
- Provide a framework to guide further research, technical assistance, and evaluation efforts

TASPP Exemplary Program Nomination Process

The program nomination process used by TASPP to identify exemplary programs throughout the United States will focus on obtaining detailed descriptions of the components. Once a detailed description of the twenty components has been obtained for each program nominated, the application will be reviewed by a panel of at least three leaders in the field of vocational education for youth and adults with special needs. Those programs receiving outstanding ratings will be included in an annual publication that will be developed by TASPP and disseminated through the National Center's Materials Distribution Service.

Those interested in participating in the program nomination process should contact: Thomas R. Wermuth, University of Illinois, VOTEC Education, 345 Education Building, 1310 South Sixth Street, Champaign, IL 61820, (217) 333-0807.

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This is the third in a series of TASPP BRIEFs. Research and resources addressing the benefits of vocational education for students at risk of dropping out of school were discussed in the first two BRIEFs. Forthcoming issues will examine the latest research, newest resources, and exemplary vocational programs for students with special needs. This BRIEF was prepared by Thomas R. Wermuth, Graduate Research Assistant and Maureen Coyle Williams, TASPP Resource Specialist.

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